



## Floodplain Management: A Job To Be Taken Seriously

### Full Mitigation Best Practice Story

#### *Bee County, Texas*

**Bee County, TX** - When Dennis DeWitt assumed the role of floodplain administrator for Bee County, he had no idea what duties were attached to the position. He had not been on the job a year when he faced a rude awakening. There was a flood and his response to local residents affected by it was lacking.



Originally from Beeville, Texas, DeWitt has worn many hats during his career, including Bee County's Director of Community Affairs for the past seven years. Floodplain management is just one of the many roles he executes.

"When I took the job I didn't know what a floodplain manager was," he admits. "I was told there were some maps somewhere and that people came in and they put their dot on the map to indicate where they lived."

Immediately following a flood in 2000, he received a call from a representative of the Governor's Division of Emergency Management. DeWitt identified himself, as floodplain manager, with much confidence. When questioned regarding the issuance of permits to residents in the process of re-building his response was, "I don't know what you are talking about." At that moment he knew he had to become a fast learner.

DeWitt learned that floodplain management involves both corrective and preventative measures for reducing flood damage. He researched information on zoning requirements, building codes, and special-purpose floodplain ordinances. He familiarized himself with the role of the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) and its floodplain management requirements. He could discuss the Increase Cost of Compliance (ICC) and the Community Assistance Program (CAP) relative to the NFIP.

The CAP helps states identify, prevent, and resolve floodplain management issues in participating communities prior to a flood event. ICC coverage is available to individuals with flood insurance whose cost of building repairs following a flood event is more than 50 percent of its pre-flood value. This coverage provides up to \$30,000 to elevate, demolish, or relocate the home.

"I found out that it was more to this than simply putting a dot on a map. You dealt with people, property, emotions, and psychology. You had to be correct," he said.

DeWitt revisited his role. He drafted a series of forms, flyers, and letters. "When we started having problems with flooding I went to the newspaper with this form, which is printed on water-resistant paper. It specifically tells residents what they need to do in a flood event and who they need to contact," De Witt said. The form is given to residents or left on their door.

Another form, the Development Permit Application, has to be completed for any structure being repaired, renovated or improved, if the cost equals or exceeds 50 percent or more of the value of the structure. It is also required for new construction. A multi-purpose form, each resident must list an emergency contact number and become familiar with the floodplain management information, which is included in the form. Flood map number, flood zone, and map date are listed.

Following an on-site visit, a Damage Determination letter is issued to residents affected by a flood. In it, Dewitt lists the percent of structural damage, base flood elevation for the location of the property, an estimated level of the present elevation of the home, zoning, map number, and re-building requirements. A statement regarding NFIP and ICC is also included.

Area residents and newcomers are encouraged to visit with DeWitt. He invites them into the map room and educates them on the location of their property, the base flood elevation (BFE), and discusses flood prevention measures. "I want them to know what they are getting themselves into. I don't try to tell them not to build or re-build in that location."

Trying times characterized the first six months of his new program. He was confronted with resistance from some of the local residents who did not welcome change. "Change is hard for a lot of people. I became an enforcer, so to speak. My motto was: "There are two ways we can do this....The easy way or the hard way."

DeWitt acquainted them with the guidelines and followed up on compliance. "You have to follow up. Check on them. When they realize that you're going to follow up, they usually do the right thing" he said. "We take pictures, call on the phone, and pay them a visit."

As a result of his perseverance, his floodplain management strategy has proven effective. His office has been the recipient of several grants. He offers advice for others working in his capacity, "Be available. If residents say they need your help, give it to them. Above all, be an educator."

#### Activity/Project Location

Geographical Area: **Single County (County-wide)**

FEMA Region: **Region VI**

State: **Texas**

County: **Bee County**

#### Key Activity/Project Information

Sector: **Public**

Hazard Type: **Flooding**

Activity/Project Type: **Education/Outreach/Public Awareness**

Activity/Project Start Date: **12/2000**

Activity/Project End Date: **Ongoing**

Funding Source: **Local Sources**

#### Activity/Project Economic Analysis

Cost: **Amount Not Available**

Non FEMA Cost: **0**

#### Activity/Project Disaster Information

Mitigation Resulted From Federal  
Disaster? **No**

Value Tested By Disaster? **Yes**

Tested By Federal Disaster #: **No Federal Disaster specified**

Year First Tested: **2007**

Repetitive Loss Property? **Unknown**

## Reference URLs

Reference URL 1: <http://www.fema.gov/plan/prevent/floodplain/index.shtm>

Reference URL 2: <http://www.fema.gov/plan/prevent/fhm/index.shtm>

## Main Points

- Dennis DeWitt became floodplain manager and had little experience.
- After a flood in 200, he realized that he needed to learn more about the position
- DeWitt learned that floodplain management involves both corrective and preventative measures for reducing flood damage.
- He researched information on zoning requirements, building codes and special-purpose floodplain ordinances.
- He familiarized himself with the role of the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) and its floodplain management requirements.
- He then proceeded to make people aware of changes they would need to make to their properties in order to prevent future damages.
- As a result of his perseverance, his floodplain management strategy has proven effective.



This is a picture of the floodplain manager in Bee County, Texas



DeWitt examines a flood map